Alter et al S-3 (1952-53) 1953 MS Middle East
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## APPENDIX II

## THE JIBRAIL RURAL FELLOWSHIP CENTRE, LEBANON

By S. Neale Alter*

The Fellowship Centre is located in the village of Jibrail, Akkar, Lebanon, which has around nine hundred people, all of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihood. This village is the geographical centre for an ecological area of some twenty thousand people. Our village reconstruction programme began in 1954, though our Presbyterian Mission had an academic school there before that time. Ours is the only controlled experimental demonstration centre of its kind in Lebanon.

When this reconstruction project began, Jibrail, like most other villages of the Near East was resigned to half-crops, half-health, half-adequate housing, half-happiness, and half-living. Since we were convinced that all of these factors must be treated as a unit, the programme dealt with the following: fundamental education for teen-age boys and girls, as well as adults, control of diseases of men, animals and plants, improvement of agriculture and live stock, control of water and soil conservation and irrigation, rural industries to make use of leisure time; and the development of moral, social and spiritual values within the indigenous religious cultures.

We have been experimenting for several years with a strategy which would reach the whole village through contacting individuals, family units, the village and the ecological area in their "grass-roots" environment. This technique is the same as that which would be used to meet the economy of a rural family which had run down land, poor crops - hence poor food, inferior animals and trees, poor health; and consequently poor members in the family unit. In the East the village resembles a large family, consequently there must be a unit approach, rather than the departmental approach, as is used in the extension systems of the West. After there is considerable development the departmental approach may apply equally well to the East.

Over a period of years we have accumulated considerable data on this unit approach. Our Centre is constantly being requested by individuals, government and others to share this data, especially in the Arabic language. We feel that it would be a real service to the whole Near East to provide some printed material.

We have the following assets:

1. Personnel and leadership. Mrs. Alter and I have had special training and experience in rural education and rural reconstruction. We have developed a staff of able Lebanese who understand our philosophy and co-operate as colleagues. We are in process of developing a Lebanese Board of Directors to take over more and more of the administration.

2. We have two schools, for boys and girls, which are co-operating closely with the Fundamental Education of UNESCO. These schools have a student body and graduates through whom we may continue experimentation and demonstration.

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*Chapter Ten*

# *SYRIA AND LEBANON*

## The Land and the People

The area of the present Syria and Lebanon lies to the north of Arabia Deserta and is the western horn of the Fertile Crescent. The two republics do not enclose within their boundaries a natural geographic entity and their climate and topography are best studied in relation to the surrounding countries;[1] but within the political boundaries of the two states, the following geographical divisions may roughly be distinguished:

(1) *The Coastal Strip.* This is about twenty miles wide near Latakia and rather less just north of Tripoli, but in some places disappears and the mountains meet the sea. Olives, bananas, citrus, and vegetables are cultivated intensively near Beirut.

(2) *The Mountains.* Starting from the north, the first coastal mountains are the Jebel Ansariya (also known as the Alawi Mountains) which average 4,000 feet and are well populated on the western slopes. To the south is the Homs–Tripoli gap and then starts the Lebanon range with peaks of over 10,000 feet. Even on the upper slopes of this range water is plentiful, there is close cultivation, and the villages and towns are prosperous. Near Beirut are situated the mountain resorts to which most of the city workers move each night when the summer brings its humid heat. The interior ranges of mountains lying parallel to that of the Lebanon are the Anti-Lebanon (between Homs and Zahle) reaching over 7,000 feet and the range of Hermon (between Zahle and the Israel border) which reaches 9,200 feet. Water and cultivation are far less plentiful on these than on the coastal mountains. Farther inland still and to the south of Damascus lie the Leja, a bleak area of igneous rock, and the Jebel Druze, which reaches 5,000–6,000 feet and lies north of the Jordan border.

(3) *Plains and Plateaux.* Hardly any of the territory of Syria and Lebanon lies less than 700 feet above sea-level and south of Hama almost all the land is over 1,600 feet. The richest agricultural land is on fairly high ground and forms part of a

[1] See W. B. Fisher, *The Middle East; a Physical, Social, and Regional Geography* (London, Methuen, 1950).